

MINUTES

Housing and Communities Committee

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Minutes of a meeting held on Tuesday, 23 February 2021

PRESENT:

Councillor Gordon (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Henry
Councillor Mackenzie
Councillor Rimmer
Councillor Smith (Chairman)
Councillor Yaqub

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillor Blake – Group Leader
Councillor Hedley – Deputy Group Leader
Mrs French – Co-opted Member without voting rights
Mrs Forder – Co-opted Member without voting rights
Mr Wood – Co-opted Member without voting rights
Mrs Tina Tickner – Basildon Community Transport Service

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Community Safety Manager, Director of Property and Housing, Head of Culture and Health, Head of Innovations, Strategic Insights and Partnership Manager, Service Manager - Housing Management and Communities, Tenancy Services Manager, Manager of Cleaner Neighbourhoods, Management Accountant (CDS) and Senior Governance Officer

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137. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:

Councillor Mackenzie replaced Councillor Schrader for the duration of the meeting.

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138. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

Declaration Under Members Code of Conduct

Item 4. Basildon Community Transport Service Performance Update/Item 5. Pride Team Update/ Item 6. Safer Basildon Partnership – Serious Violence Action Plan/Item 7. Early Years Policy 2021-24 – Councillors Smith, Henry and Hedley declared non pecuniary interests as Essex County Council Members

139. MINUTES:

The Minutes of the Housing and Communities Committee held on 12 January 2021 were approved as a true record.

(For voting see Appendix, column 1.)

140. BASILDON COMMUNITY TRANSPORT SERVICE PERFORMANCE UPDATE:

The Committee were provided with an overview of performance of the Basildon Community Transport Service (BCTS) in respect of the previous three years and proposals for a further three year grant funding agreement. The council had currently provided £76,000 grant funding per annum for the provision of community transport (£50,000) and general services (£26,000).

Members were advised that BCTS were performing well and fulfilling all the requirements of their grant funding agreement. In March 2020 BCTS were forced to suspend their transport service due to the covid-19 pandemic, although limited services were introduced later in the year. The general services stream was also affected by the pandemic. Whilst not being able to provide their usual transport service BCTS had worked in partnership with local organisations to support their community which went beyond their service level agreement targets.

Members were advised that due to the impact of the pandemic, at present BCTS had an underspend of £27,737 for the remainder of 2020/21. BCTS planned to utilise the forecast underspend for preparing the organisation to resume services once government restrictions were lifted and the proposed investments were outlined in the report.

Tina Tickner, Chief Executive Officer of BCTM, attended the meeting to answer Members' questions on issues which included the potential and expense for the future introduction of electric vehicles, confirmation that the service was providing transport for residents to attend vaccination appointments, sponsorship opportunities and the organisation's progress in asking local MPs to lobby the Department of Transport to change vehicle

licensing restrictions in order to expand the type of contracts the BCTS could bid for.

Members discussed the report, asked for points of clarification and considered the options outlined in the report. They observed the importance of maintaining and replacing the BCTM's vehicles/ future use of electric vehicles to ensure the service continued successfully. They also commented on the need to ensure that the grant funding reflected inflation costs going forward to make sure that the BCTM was adequately funded and expressed their support for the services it provided to the community.

An amendment to the recommendations 1 and 2 as set out in the Agenda to add -

and that a further award of the average Consumer Price Index for the last three years be applied which would provide an additional £3,500 in total of funding for each year.

upon being put to the meeting was declared carried.

(For voting see Appendix, column 2.)

The Chairman thanked Tina Tickner for attending the meeting and updating Members.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Council enters into a 3 year grant funding agreement with the Basildon Community Transport Service from 1 April 2021 for the provision of Community Transport and awards funding of £50,000 per annum for the duration of the agreement and that a further award of the average Consumer Price Index for the last three years be applied which would provide an additional £2,300 of funding for each year.
2. That the Council enters into a 3 year grant funding agreement with Basildon Community Transport Service from 1 April 2021 for the provision of General Services and awards funding of £26,000 per annum for the duration of the agreement and that a further award of the average Consumer Price Index for the last three years be applied which would provide an additional £1,200 of funding for each year.

(For voting see Appendix, column 3.)

3. That this Committee instructs officers to undertake analysis of the Council's budget for 2022/23 for the necessary funding to procure an electrical vehicle for the Basildon Community Transport Service.

(For voting see Appendix, column 4.)

4. That the Committee writes to the local MPs asking for progress on their lobbying of the Department of Transport to change vehicle

licensing restrictions in order to expand the type of contracts the BCTS could bid for.

(For voting see Appendix, column 5.)

141. PRIDE TEAM UPDATE:

The Manager of Cleaner Neighbourhoods provided Members with a presentation on the work of the HRA Pride Teams. He advised that the Teams were responsible for providing proactive and responsive works across the borough, footpath and overgrown vegetation clearance, the removal of lower branches to improve access, environmental improvements, the edging back of footpaths, deep cleansing of untidy areas, removal of dumping from overgrown areas and the removal of vegetation obstructions. He provided details of the work undertaken during the year which had been impacted by the covid-19 pandemic.

There were a number of Pride Teams under the HRA and General Fund and there had been an operation review which sought to bring them together under one banner with clearer links to ensure an effective delivery for the borough. This included shared responsibilities, direction and performance measures, a focus on delivering tangible improvements for residents, an operation steering group and ensuring dialogue with ward members and increased links with the community.

Members considered the presentation, asked questions and sought clarification on a number of issues including the work undertaken in the sheltered housing schemes and grass cutting during lockdown, the progress of the three month abandoned trolley survey, the working relationship with Essex County Council's Rangers team and the prioritisation of work due to the pandemic.

Members felt that the Pride Teams were becoming a noticeable and effective tool in improving the appearance of local estates.

142. SAFER BASILDON PARTNERSHIP - SERIOUS VIOLENCE ACTION PLAN:

The Committee considered a report on the Safer Basildon Partnerships Serious Violence Action Plan 2021-22, a local multi-agency action plan using the public health approach to tackling serious violence which had been approved by the Safer Basildon Partnership Board in late 2020. The Committee were asked to consider and endorse the approach being taken to reduce violence and vulnerability across the borough as set out in the action plan. Members considered the report and presentation and asked questions. They expressed their support for the action plan and the work of the Partnership to reduce violence and vulnerability across the borough. It was noted that the Online Harms bill was currently being considered by Parliament and Members were keen to support this.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Housing and Communities Committee endorse the Safer Basildon Partnership Serious Violence Action Plan 2021-22 and supports the approach being taken to reduce violence and vulnerability across the Borough.

(For voting see Appendix, column 6.)

2. That the Committee writes to local MPs with evidence of the work being undertaken by the Safer Basildon Partnership in respect of online grooming to assist them in giving evidence to the debate in respect of the Online Harms Bill currently being considered by Parliament.

(For voting see Appendix, column 7.)

143. EARLY YEARS POLICY 2021-24:

The Committee considered the Early Years Policy which had been developed to enable the Council to provide a localised response with the Early Years sector and to work with Essex County Council and other partners to ensure that high quality Early Years education was available to residents. Members received a presentation outlining the policy and options, asked questions, sought clarification and commented on its content. Members expressed their support for the policy and its aims.

RESOLVED:

That the Early Years Policy 2021-24 as set out in the Enclosure to the report be approve and adopted.

(For voting see Appendix, column 8.)

144. THE PREVENTION CONCORDAT FOR MENTAL HEALTH:

The Commission for Equality in Mental Health had been set up in 2018 to explore what caused mental health inequalities, what perpetuated them, and what might help to break the cycle. The Commission had produced its final report "Commission for Equality in Mental Health" in November 2020. The report identified Basildon Council as an exemplar in the provision of services to alleviate poor mental health with the Council's Health in all Policies approach.

Public Health England had expressed an interest in this approach and had reached out to officers with a view to the Council becoming a signatory to the Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health. This was a Public Health England led initiative that was underpinned by an understanding that taking a

prevention-focused approach to improving the public's mental health has been shown to make a valuable contribution to achieving a fairer and more equitable society. Members were advised that to be recognised as a Prevention Concordat signatory, the council would need to agree the consensus statement set out in the report and produce an action plan addressing the 5-domain framework.

The Committee considered the report and options, sought points of clarification and asked questions. Members expressed their support for signing the Concordat and also thanked Councillor Gordon and officers for the considerable and successful work carried out in respect of the wellbeing and mental health agenda under the umbrella of the Health and Wellbeing Partnership. They also acknowledged the support and partnership working with Essex County Council to take forward new initiatives.

RESOLVED:

That the council signs up to the Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health.

(For voting see Appendix, column 9.)

145. ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR POLICY:

Members were advised that the current Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) policy was due for renewal and the revised policy had no significant changes. The Committee considered the report, which set out the Council's proposed policy for the management of ASB, including Hate Crime and Domestic Abuse, in the Basildon borough following its scheduled review. The policy had been developed in line with the requirements of Section 218A of the Housing Act 1996 as inserted by the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 (ASB Act 2003) in relation to local authority landlords and set out how the council would work in partnership to prevent and tackle anti-social behaviour, not just in Council tenancies but across the Basildon borough regardless of the tenure of the complainant or the perpetrator. The policy had been made available for public consultation via the Council's website and no adverse feedback had been received.

Members considered the report, options and draft policy, sought points of clarification and asked questions including the meaningfulness of the current customer satisfaction survey and whether other methods could be used to gain more useful feedback, initiatives to implement further online software and improve the customer experience, the culture of intimidation and support for residents affected by ASB. Members felt that there needed to be a further review of ASB in the borough and the ASB policy and discussed the formation of a working group.

RESOLVED:

1. That an Anti-Social Behaviour working group be established to review

anti-social behaviour within the borough. The group to be made up of 8 Members (Group Leaders to nominate representatives) and chaired by Councillor Blake.

(For voting see Appendix, column 10.)

2. That the Committee approves the revised Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, as set out in the report, subject to any further amendments from the Anti-Social Behaviour working group.

(For voting see Appendix, column 11.)

146. RENT ARREARS PREVENTION & RECOVERY POLICY:

Members were presented with a report on the revised Rent Arrears Prevention and Recovery Policy. A review of the current policy had been undertaken, which had been successful in providing tenants in financial difficulties with the support they needed, and in reducing rent arrears, as a result of this. There had been no significant changes made to the existing policy. The policy had been made available for public consultation via the Council's website and no adverse feedback had been received.

The Committee were also updated on the challenges presented by the covid-19 pandemic and were advised that the Council had worked pro-actively to support tenants, where possible to continue to pay their rent and to prevent arrears accruing by further strengthening early intervention support. In July 2020 the Council announced an amnesty on evicting tenants in Council owned social housing who were suffering financial hardship directly from covid-19 until March 2021 and it was proposed to extend this to September 2021.

Members considered the report and options, sought clarification and asked questions.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee approve the Rent Arrears Prevention and Recovery Policy as set out in Enclosure No. 2 to the report.
2. That the Committee approves the extension of the amnesty on evicting tenants in Basildon Council owned social housing who are suffering financial hardship directly from Covid-19 until 30 September 2021.

(For voting see Appendix, column 12.)

147. WORK PROGRAMME - UPDATE:

The Committee considered the work programme for the remainder of the

Municipal year. Two additional items would be added for the next meeting on 16 March 2021:

- West Ham United Foundation Collaborative Work – report on the partnership work of the foundation and the council.
- Together for Safer Communities – update on arrangements for taking this forward after the cessation of lockdown in July.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee endorse the work programme as set out in the report with the two additional items added.

(For voting see Appendix, column 13.)

CHAIRMAN

RECORDING OF VOTES

Vote Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
CONSERVATIVE																			
Henry J	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F						
Mackenzie L	-	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F						
Rimmer C	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F						
LABOUR																			
Gordon A	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F						
Yaqub M	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F						
INDEPENDENTS																			
Smith K	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F						
Vote Number	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19

KEY:

- F = In Favour
- A = Against
- = Abstain
- O = Not present for vote
- * = Casting vote in favour
- ∅ = Casting vote against
- # = No vote cast

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